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**SUBJECT:** Concerns about the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed Honolulu Rail Transit System.

Dear Mr. Yoshioka:

Although I am an active member of the Honolulu Chapter of the American Institute of Architects this letter represents my personal opinions and should not be regarded as the official opinion or statement emanating from the Honolulu Chapter of the AIA. I have had my own Architectural firm since 1968 and have witnessed the progressive rising of construction costs here in Hawaii. . Since no major overhead rail system has been built in the United States for many years there has to be little confidence in obtaining a realistic cost comparison when projecting the costs of the current rail project . Preliminary engineering costs are but a shot in the dark. There are many obstacles ahead that will increase the present estimate. These include soil testing (lava tubes or unsuitable ground conditions), Hawaiian Burial sites, higher property acquisition costs, litigation, and the extensive relocation of utilities to name a few. Major construction projects on the mainland have generally increased by forty or more per cent from original estimates. The final cost will only be established when final construction drawings are prepared, and even then one can expect many change orders.

There are so many inaccuracies in the above referenced document that it is hard to decide just where to begin in setting out a sound response to its many flaws. Before listing these many shortfalls it is important to state up front that in spite of the results of the recent election , forty nine percent of Oahu residents did not vote in favor of the project. This happened in spite of millions of taxpayer dollars being spent by the city on fraudulently false propaganda. One of the most outlandish claims hurled at the voters on television and radio prior to the election was the heralding of the success of the Charlotte rail system. That system is a LIGHT RAIL AT GRADE rail line and is nothing remotely similar to the proposed Honolulu project. I notice that even now in the City's "On The Move" newsletter of January 26<sup>th</sup> there continues to be praise for the LIGHT RAIL on grade Phoenix rail line which again has no similarity to the one that is proposed in the draft EIS . Both local daily newspapers heavily endorsed the scheme together with local politicians and a pro rail group partially financed by Parsons Brinkerhoff interests. In contrast the opponents of the project were greatly disadvantaged by having just limited grass roots financing and were only able to purchase very limited media advertising . And yet they still garnered almost half of the total election votes opposing the rail project as it now stands.

Perhaps the most glaring error in the slick advertising paid for by the taxpayers and aired relentlessly on TV and radio by the City was the showing of pictures of cars stalled in traffic. The draft EIS even admits (for once honestly!) that traffic will only get worse even with rail. Honolulu needs traffic relief NOW and the rail project does NOTHING to address that problem.

The cold facts are that during construction over the next many years, with closing of lanes and disruption of businesses, traffic congestion will only be far worse. The State's newly revealed plans to add lanes to the H 1 freeway and its other extensive road improvement programs do at least address the traffic congestion problem. But this will result in a profusion of road closings caused by the competing projects.

How in the world as the draft EIS states can there be "No adverse affects to neighborhoods" when the proposed high level rail line overpowers each street that it penetrates virtually destroying the very heart and soul of the neighborhood? On the subject of neighborhoods it is relevant to reflect on the recent games played by the City Council on the Salt Lake Alternative. In order to obtain the deciding original vote to approve the project, the Councilman for the Salt Lake area forced the Council to route the rail through his district. Prior to the election there was a tremendous sales pitch on persuading the Salt Lake area residents to vote for rail. They did. And guess what!! Several days after the election the City Council decided to move the alternate alignment back to the airport. If voters in the Salt Lake area had known prior to the election that the routing through their community would be cancelled then the no rail vote might have persevered. In defense of the Salt Lake area Councilman it must be conceded that he is the one member who has concerns about the overall costs and who predicted that because of the lowering projections of the rail tax due to the current recession and a major drop off in tourist dollars that in a few years the rail project could be Two Billion dollars in arrears.

One of the most troubling sections in the draft EIS has been the failure to fairly address the alternative systems. A light rail system at grade is the preferred option in virtually every mainland city as it avoids the huge expense and aesthetic disaster of having an overhead rail system destroying the fabric of the historic urban area. It is simply not true that the light rail alternative at grade could possibly be more expensive than the proposed overhead rail project. The savings in having at grade stations would be considerable as there would be no need for escalators, elevators, stairs and the extensive concrete structures. Both the High Occupancy Hot Lanes (HOV) and the Transportation System Management Alternative (TSM) were also not adequately studied in the draft EIS. Both these systems have proven to be most successful in several mainland cities and would be far superior to the proposed overhead heavy rail project They would also cost much less of taxpayers money and would be completed in a shorter time frame than the presently proposed system. The statement on Page 2-1 of the draft EIS contains a gross falsehood by stating that the proposed overhead rail system would cost less and have less environmental community impact than the alternative projects. Many of the people that voted for the rail project did not realize that the proposed Elevated third rail project has no comparison to the Charlotte rail project that was so brazenly praised in the many television and radio advertising paid for with taxpayer money.

The recently opened Phoenix Light Rail System should provide a serious eye opener to those people who still believe that the proposed third rail overhead system proposed in the draft EIS is the answer to Oahu's traffic problems. The Phoenix system cost one point four million dollars for a twenty mile light rail at grade system, of which almost half was paid for by the Federal Government. The Phoenix metropolitan area has a population of over four million, more than four times that of Oahu and their light rail system was completed in four years The question is: why have the so called traffic experts burdened our city's taxpayers on this ill conceived project, costing (without future change orders) at least twice the cost of the Phoenix system. There are thirty five mainland cities that have chosen an on grade light rail system, whereas only one city ,Miami, (in the nineteen seventies )has chosen an elevated heavy third rail solution. Cleveland, Ohio which is sixteenth in Metropolitan area population has a heavy rail system and no city

between Cleveland and Honolulu, which is in fifty sixth place in population has an overhead rail system.

The draft EIS admits that the so called ideal corridor is but one mile wide in places with the mountains on one side and the ocean on the other. To support a train of this magnitude it is imperative to have many miles of heavy urbanized population on both sides of the rail corridor not just mountains and ocean. If people today still insist on commuting with one person to a car and decline the choice of car pooling or the express bus then there is little chance that in the future they would board the train with its many stops and much more limited freedom of movement. The ridership projections appear to be grossly overstated. The fact of Honolulu being the third most expensive city in country, after New York and San Francisco, has resulted in more people leaving the State than those coming in. The following statement in the draft EIS in chapter 4, page 4 "...would reduce transportation energy consumption" is a pure lie. The true fact is that Light Rail at grade would consume eight times less BTU's per hour.

There appears to be a total conflict of interest when having the main contractor on the project being the one to prepare the EIS, which in this case has resulted in the document becoming a highly suspect and prejudiced sales pitch in favor of the project. What is the point of even having an EIS if it is just to become a rubber stamp for the project. An independent EIS would have exposed the serious environmental and aesthetic concerns that this one does not honestly address.. It is comforting to know that a recent press release from the City described the next contract to be signed for the project. Having spent weeks responding to the draft EIS we are now told that this new contract will be a feasibility and risk management report. If this is to be an independent study then there is hope that the proposed rail project should be terminated since an impartial study will reveal that the proposed rail project is far too expensive and will do little to solve traffic congestion, the sole reason for its development. With the recent lingering dispute over the EIS for the Super Ferry service it is interesting to note that the Ferry issue was primarily about the impact on whales, whereas the draft EIS for rail has a thousand times more impact as it will essentially destroy the whole character of urban Honolulu.

The proposed elevated rail system will have a devastating effect on the neighborhoods over which it will pass, in many cases displacing businesses and private property. The elevated stations and overhead concrete guideway will dominate the existing skyline resulting in a blocking of ocean and mountain views. The sound of an overhead train passing every few minutes will have a major impact on the lives of those people working or living in the immediate vicinity of its path. This will be extremely severe where it penetrates and destroys the present character of Dillingham Boulevard, Halekauwila street and the other streets as it proceeds towards Ala Moana Center. There will also be serious negative impingement to the character of Chinatown and an overpowering negative effect as it penetrates downtown passing Bishop Street, Aloha Tower and Irwin Park. Several years ago there was a concrete overhead structure at the foot of Bishop Street which was demolished resulting in opening up the view to the harbor. Other cities such as San Francisco, Baltimore and New York have also removed obstructive concrete structures near the waterfront in order to recover important view planes to the harbor.

In looking to the future it is relevant to consider the major financial burdens that are facing the New York Metropolitan Transit system., which has the highest ridership in America. The projected shortfall in millions of dollars is so critical that plans are afoot to lay off hundreds of workers, cut service on many of the routes, close down several stations, increase fares and charge tolls on all the presently free bridges in order to balance the budget. How can we even consider building this commuter train that will be running virtually empty for most of the day on an island

just a small fraction of the size or population of New York? These mainland cities have major transportation projects already in place for many years and their financial problems are still severe although unlike Honolulu many of their systems have already been paid for.

With the almost daily breaks in the city's water lines and sewers and the serious eroding of the condition of the existing streets which have been neglected over the years it seems that these utilities are far more worthy of the spending of taxpayer money than the proposed heavy rail system which will do little to solve the traffic problems. On December 12, 2008 there were nine serious overflows of sewage being spilt into almost all shorelines of Oahu, not exactly the environment that the millions of tourists expect when they come to Oahu. The excise taxes put aside for the transit project will be falling far short of projections due to the failing economy and downturn in the tourist industry. The public hearings have addressed many of these concerns to the City Council but unfortunately the testimony given from many well qualified professionals and concerned citizens has fallen on deaf ears and the project continues to move forward regardless.

Where did we go wrong? In 2004 the candidate for Mayor had a strong campaign slogan which was "Do We Need it, Can we Afford it, Can we Maintain it" Nothing about rail, which surfaced some year or two after his election. Fast forward to today and the question is the same, and the answer is a resounding "NO"

The removal of hundreds of trees to accommodate the project is simply not acceptable and the construction of heavy concrete columns down the center of existing streets will have a devastating effect on each neighborhood that it penetrates. The vast areas under the overhead concrete guide ways will become urban eyesores, devoid of landscaping and presenting an opportunity for homeless shelters and accompanying crime. Dillingham Boulevard, Halekauwila Street and all the other existing streets below the rail line will be reduced to a dark and dreary no mans' land similar to the existing portion of Nimitz Highway under the H-1 running past the airport. The proposed land acquisition is also a major concern as it will force many residents and businesses to relocate from their present neighborhoods.

In spite of these many concerns it is troubling that the draft EIS in chapter four, page six states: "Since there would be no adverse effects to neighborhoods, no mitigation is required". Another great concern is that although the future extensions to Manoa and Waikiki are shown on the draft EIS maps, there is no evaluation given to the enormous environmental impact that these future branch lines would impose on these very special areas of Honolulu. It appears to be extremely imprudent of the City to even contemplate starting construction without receiving approval for the entire system. If as an architect I am commissioned to design a project, and after many months of preliminary design, the client (the taxpayer) determines that the project does not meet the requirements of cost, aesthetics and the reason for the project(easing traffic congestion), then the contract should be mutually terminated.

It is surely time to pull the plug on this ill conceived poorly planned project that will bankrupt Honolulu both financially and aesthetically placing a huge burden of debt and sacrifice on our children and grandchildren in the years ahead. It is time to start planning immediately either on the development of a light rail system at grade, or to reconsider the benefits of the alternatives and coordinate with the State in expanding its plans to overhaul and improve our badly neglected highway system. The City Council's vote for "Steel on Steel" could still be valid, but only with an on grade light rail system similar to the one that the City has been praising in Charlotte and Phoenix. In responding to the many concerns submitted from many associations and private

citizens it is time for the City to address those concerns and terminate the current contracts. Nine years is too long to wait for a project that is too expensive, does not solve our traffic problems and will forever destroy the character of our city.

Sincerely Yours

Geoffrey G., Paterson AIA Emeritus

Cc: Ted Matley FTA San Francisco

Governor Linda Lingle

Mayor Mufi Hanneman

Todd Apo, Chair and members of the City Council of Honolulu City Council

Senator Dan Inouye

Senator Dan Akaka

US Representative Neil Abercrombie

US Representative Mazie Hirono

Laura Thielen DLNR

Colleen Hanabusa, Senate President

Calvin K.Y. Say, Speaker of the House